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SIPDIS

FOR I/FW, B/G, IIP/G/NEA-SA, B/VOA/N (BANGLA SERVICE) STATE  
FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCENSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,  
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45  
(MAJ NICHOLLS)

USARPAC FOR APOP-IM (MAJ HEDRICK)

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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Middle East; Dhaka

Summary: An op-ed page article in "Daily Star" apprehends that the Palestinian issue may slip from Washington's priorities as the U.S. is engaged in greater Middle East issues.

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Middle East  
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"Palestinian State: Unpredictable As Ever"

An op-ed page article by M. Abdul Hafiz, former Director General of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in the English language newspaper "Daily Star" opines (4/11):

"... early in last February in a summit hosted by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Mahmud Abbas, the President of Palestinian Authority, and Israel's Ariel Sharon agreed on a ceasefire hoping that it would lead to peace. However, there has been no progress in that direction. There is no indication either from Tel Aviv or Washington that a new peace plan is on the anvil. Only hope emanates from President Bush's commitment to the revival of peace process. In his state of the union address on the second February last George Bush called for a two-state solution of the Arab-Israeli imbroglio as before. Since then Washington has not as yet come up with any plan laying down timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territory and the emergence of a sovereign Palestinian state.

As the US is at the moment engaged on bigger chessboard of Mid-East politics that includes Iran in the Gulf and Lebanon in the Levant the West Asian peace might have slipped out of Washington's priority but the US will hopefully come up with a 'new road map to peace' any time soon. What is however more crucial in this regard is whether Israel will accept such plan and cooperate with the peace brokers and how much the US will be able to withstand Israeli intransigence -- given her strong lobby working in Bush Administration. The doubt arises from the fates of many similar peace plans in the past which all ended in fiasco.

The peace processes are in progress in one form or other for last one and half decade. It began with the signing on 13 February, 1993 of a declaration of principles by PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. It provided for the coming into being of a Palestinian state ten years later by 2003. Rabin was murdered by a Zionist fanatic and those who followed him -- Mr. Netanyahu and Ehud Barak -- shot down the peace process itself with the full help from the Zionist hawks of Clinton Administration -- Ms Madeleine Albright, Mr Denis Ross and Martin Indyke. Mr Bush announced an abortive 'new road map' in April 2003 providing for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the emergence of a Palestinian state by 2005. Bush himself torpedoed the road map when he started pleading for Ariel Sharon by saying that Israel would have to retain 'some' West Bank land and as such the proposed withdrawal could not be 'total'. Later he also described 2005 as an unrealistic date for a Palestinian state to emerge.

In the meantime scepticism abounds as to what would be the fate of another peace plan that may be announced sooner or later." [sic]

Chammas